

Mesopotamia, took possession of the whole of China, sent their forces through Hungary, Poland, and Silesia, subdued or made tributary all the Provinces of Russia, and even looked with wistful eye from the shores of the Adriatic across to the very Papal States, were tolerant to Jews, Mahomedans, and Christians, whether their church were Roman, Greek, or Nestorian. Marco Polo, a distinguished Venetian traveller, about sixty years before our own Sir John Mandeville, journeyed in the East, and, about 1263, penetrated to Pekin. He spent about twenty years in China, at that time more accessible to foreigners than at any other period of its history; and at Chili-Kiang held a high office under Kublai Khan, the grandson of the famous Zenghis. In his work, which was first translated into English in 1579, he often speaks of meeting with Nestorian Christians in Tartary and China. Even before the time of Marco Polo the story of a Christian King, called Prester John, lived, or had lived, in the East, together with a desire to pacify the Mongols lest they should think of crossing the Alps and invading Italy, induced the Pope, Innocent IV., to send certain Dominican and Franciscan monks to the successor of Zenghis, who likewise found out the Nestorians, to the sorrow and loss of the latter. At the same time, Louis the IX., generally called St. Louis of France, sent an embassy after Prester John, inviting him to aid in the great crusade which he projected against the Saracens. But the original and independent Prester John had left the scene, and, not long after, the plague put an end to the crusading days of the French King. Marco Polo, however, relates that he found George, a descendent of Prester John, who was both a Christian and a priest, sitting on the throne of a part of his ancestor's original dominions, as a tributary of the Mongol Khan. Comestabularius, an Armenian, in a letter which he wrote to the King of Cyprus in 1248, speaks of Christians whom he had met in Tartary in great numbers, and expresses his belief that he had found the land whence the three kings came to Bethlehem; for had he not seen paintings of them in the churches, "one presenting the gold, a second the frankincense, and a third the myrrh." However, no Nestorian churches, no copies of the Syriac scriptures, nor any other traces of their presence remain to-day in China, and the same is true of all Christian missions before the time of the Jesuits. "The clearest evidence that a spurious sort of Christianity once reigned over a great part of Central Asia, we have in the striking coincidence of some rites of Buddhism with the superstitions of the degenerated Eastern and Western Churches." "It is to be hoped that many souls may have been saved by means of the Nestorian missions. There may have been much admixture of error in their teachings, but we have reason to believe that the flickering flame of true piety lingered much longer with them than with any other of the ancient Christian sects."

In a future article we hope to be able to sketch the history of the Romish missions, which have been foreshadowed in this, and thus complete the story of the preparation of the Gospel in China, before proceeding to treat of Protestant evangelization.

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